



Klamath Network Featured Creature

June 2007

Western Skink (*Eumeces skiltonianus*)

FIELD NOTES:

General Description:

The western skink (*Eumeces skiltonianus*) is a smooth-scaled, medium sized (53-83 mm) lizard with small limbs and a pointed head. Four longitudinal white to beige stripes run down their back and sides and extend to the base of the tail. These stripes tend to stand out against a commonly dark body. The tail generally has some blue coloration and can be a brilliant blue in juveniles and adults with unbroken tails. Reddish patches may be present on the chin and sides of the head in breeding adults.

Reproduction:

The western skink is oviparous (producing eggs that hatch outside their body), laying one clutch of 2-6 eggs per season. Mating typically takes place between May and June. Females lay their eggs between June and July, and eggs hatch between July and August. Exact dates vary depending on geography and climate. Western skinks reach sexual maturity at approximately three years of age and can live up to nine years. Nests tend to be found in burrows excavated by the western skink that can be up to four times their body length.

Interesting Fact:

In order to protect itself, the western skink can autotomize (lose) its tail when seized by a predator. When detached, the brilliant blue tail thrashes around in an attempt to distract the predator. This gives the western skink an opportunity to escape. When the tail regenerates, it is usually similar to or larger than the original tail. However, the regenerated tail is seldom, if ever, blue in color.

Where to see it in the Klamath Parks:

The western skink is a common resident and can be found breeding throughout the Klamath Region. NPSpecies documents evidence of the western skink in Lassen Volcanic National Park, Lava Beds National Monument, Oregon Caves National Monument, Redwood National and State Parks, and Whiskeytown National Recreation Area. The species is unconfirmed in Crater Lake National Park.



© Tom A. Titus



© Gary Nafis

Feeding:

The main food source of the western skink is small arthropods including caterpillars, crickets, beetles, grasshoppers, moths, and flies. This reptile uses quick, jerky, snake-like movements to attack its prey. During the summer, most of their activity is concentrated in the morning and late afternoon. In areas where temperatures are not extreme, activity can occur throughout the day.

Habitat:

Eumeces skiltonianus occupies a wide array of habitats that contain a diverse biotic community including woodlands, grasslands, and forested areas. The western skink tends to be more abundant in areas with a large amount of protective cover including rocks, stumps, decaying logs, bark, and leaf litter. In a study conducted in southern Oregon and northern California by Bury and Corn, this species tended to be associated with young Douglas fir stands (<20 years) but was also found in lower numbers using older seral stages. In a similar study conducted by Welsh and Lind in 1988, this species was found to be more abundant in dry old-growth and mature stands of Douglas fir.

Distribution:

The western skink ranges as far north as British Columbia and as far south as Baja California. From west to east, the western skink can be found from the Pacific coast in Oregon and northern California to the western portions of Montana, Idaho, Utah, and the northwest portion of Arizona. This species can be found in a diverse array of habitats that range from sea level to approximately 2,530 meters.

Additional Information:

For more information, visit:
<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~titus/herp/documents/manning.html>

<http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection/CW69-14-347-2003E.pdf>